



The Cancer You Can Prevent

Save your skin—and possibly your life—with this must-know advice.

BY BARBARA BRODY



The tough part about avoiding most forms of cancer? Many factors, like genetics and diet, can play a role, so it's hard to figure out what keeps you safe. But skin cancer is different. It's one of the only cancers that, experts say, you can almost always dodge, because scientists are confident about what causes it. About 86% of melanoma (the most deadly type of skin cancer) cases are due to UV rays, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. Sun exposure is something you can control, but you may need to take your prevention plan to the next level. Start using these tips—today.

You already » Wear sunscreen every time you visit the park or beach

Even better » Slather it on exposed skin every day, year-round

It's easy to forget about sun protection unless it's sweltering, but if you're going to be outdoors—whether running errands, mowing

the lawn or hitting the slopes—sunscreen is a must. UV rays are a factor 12 months out of the year. Surprisingly, according to the American Cancer Society, New York and Pennsylvania are among the top five states with the highest estimated new cases of melanoma. (The others: California, Florida and Texas.)



You already » Buy sunscreen with at least 30 SPF

Even better » Make sure the bottle provides broad-spectrum protection

Sun protection factor (SPF) tells you how well a product filters out UVB rays, which make you burn. But that number doesn't consider UVA rays, which can go through glass and reach you indoors or in your car. Plus, these rays "penetrate deep into the skin to break down collagen and lead to premature aging," says Elizabeth K. Hale, MD, senior vice president for the Skin Cancer Foundation. Repeated exposure to both types of UV rays can lead to squamous cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer. So choose a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 that says "broad-spectrum protection" or "UVA/UVB" on the label.



PROTECT YOUR EYES

A pair of UV-filtering sunglasses—the bigger, the better—will guard the skin around your eyes (to help prevent basal cell cancer on the eyelids, skin cancer right above the eyebrows or melanoma in the eyes). Shades also reduce your risk of macular degeneration, a cause of blindness.

You already » Visit a tanning bed just once or twice a year before a big event

Even better » How about never?

It's impossible to go back in time and undo what you've already done, but you should consider your occasional indulgence a thing of the past. Here's why: Just one indoor tanning session increases your risk of squamous cell carcinoma by 67%. And people who first use a tanning bed prior to age 35 increase their melanoma risk by 75%. So, be sure to fess up to your dermatologist: If you have a history of indoor tanning, a lot of moles or skin cancer in your family, your doc may recommend getting skin checks every six months instead of annually. Most skin cancers—even melanomas—are highly treatable, but you have to catch them early.

CHECK YOURSELF

You know you should see a dermatologist for an annual skin check, but you should also do a monthly head-to-toe self-exam. It's easy to miss new spots or changes to old ones if you aren't looking carefully and regularly.

Go to skincancer.org/selfexam for a straightforward step-by-step illustrated guide.

You already » Drape a light cover-up over your swimsuit

Even better » Wear sun-protective clothing

While a gauzy wrap or sheer top might look cute, it won't do much for your skin. "Even a white T-shirt has an SPF of about 7, and when you get it wet, it's about a 3," says Dr. Hale. To protect yourself from the sun's rays, opt for darker clothing with a tighter weave. For the best protection, choose coverups that are made with special sun-protective material. The item should have a UPF, or ultraviolet protection factor, listed on the tag or label; look for 30 or higher. Two brands to check out for a variety of stylish options: Coolibar (coolibar.com) and Mott 50 (mott50.com).

You already » Remember to reapply after sweating or swimming

Even better » Don't skimp, and pay attention to detail

If you reapply sunscreen after 90 minutes, you're a step ahead of most. But make sure you're using

enough to cover your entire body. "If you buy an 8-ounce bottle, it should be empty after about eight uses," says Carolyn Jacob, MD, director of Chicago Cosmetic Surgery and Dermatology and a spokesperson for the American Academy of Dermatology. Also, focus on areas that are easy to miss: Cover a prominent part in your hair along with your ears, lips and the edges of your bathing suit.